



ARGENTINA



PROCLAIMING
THE WORD

Gift of Life for
a Fragile World

(Rom 8:22-23)



Final Statement

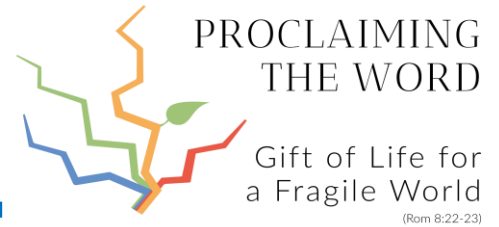
Catholic Biblical Federation
10th CBF Plenary Assembly

Mar del Plata April, 15-21 2023



Final Statement

CBF 10th Plenary Assembly
Mar Del Plata, Argentina



PROCLAIMING THE WORD

A Gift of Life for the Fragile World

I. Preamble

1. We, the one hundred and forty-one delegates representing seven regions of the Catholic Biblical Federation from fifty-three countries, have gathered in Mar del Plata, Argentina, for the 10th Plenary Assembly, held on April 15-21, 2023. Our overarching purpose was to share and reflect on the challenges facing biblical pastoral ministry in the fragile world of the third decade of the twenty-first century and, together, to seek effective and innovative ways of channeling God's life-giving love and grace into our present realities through the Scripture.
2. Unprecedented challenges marked the road leading to this Plenary Assembly. Initially scheduled for April 2021, the gathering was first postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which ravaged the globe and brought the human community to a standstill. The pandemic's impact continued even after it subsided, and the Assembly, rescheduled for October 2022, could not proceed due to a lack of quorum. Finally, at the third attempt, we gathered here in Argentina and successfully launched the Assembly on April 15, 2023.
3. The vision that animated the delegates to the Plenary Assembly is one of determined resolve to continue bringing the message of hope rooted in God's love to all creation (cf. Mark 16:15) and to proclaim the Word of God regardless of circumstances (cf. 2 Timothy 4:2). This gathering of the servants of the Word from all corners of the world, who braved time, distance, and adversity, is a living manifestation that this resolve remains undiminished.
4. Given the circumstances, this Assembly bears indubitable witness that the light of life will never be conquered by darkness (cf. John 1:5) and that God's Word empowers its servant to carry out God's will no matter what (cf. Isa 55:11). This Word enters fragile cosmic and human reality, gifting it with life, which invincibly sustains believers and the entire creation.

II. Fragility: The Context of the Assembly and of the CBF's Mission and Ministry

5. Rooted in our time and diverse contexts, we acknowledge the universal and profound fragility and deep brokenness of our world and the human community. Acknowledged also by Scripture, this fragility is perhaps best expressed by St. Paul as a state of "futility" (cf. Rom 8:20). Futility denotes the universal subjugation of all creation, including humankind, to the forces of death and disorder that disrupt harmony at all levels of existence and ultimately endanger life.

6. The futility and brokenness of our world stem from the enduring consequences of the profound disruption of God's harmonious creation, for which humanity is responsible (cf. Gen ch. 3). These consequences extend to and result in the brokenness and fragility of our entire world, with three areas that we identify as being of particular concern for our mission and ministry:
- a) **The Fragility of Creation.** Despite numerous efforts and initiatives, the ecological crisis is deepening rather than abating. Human actions and modes of life significantly contribute to the dramatic changes in the environment and the disruption of the natural world. Affected by climate change, pollution, and the loss of biodiversity, planet Earth, our home, is truly subjected to futility, for which its human caretakers are largely responsible.
 - b) **The Fragility of the Human Community.** The COVID pandemic has laid bare the fragility of the human community. It has shattered our illusions of control over the world and our ability to determine our fate. This loss of control has exposed the inherent vulnerability and transience of our existence and the ineffectiveness and futility of the structures and systems we invent to secure our lives. It has also revealed our ignorance of the long-term consequences of our actions and how easily we can fall prey to our own creations and devices.
 - c) **The Fragility of the Church.** Sinfulness, frailty, and the ego-driven pursuit of dominance and control wreaked havoc on human relationships, leading to a profound disruption of the community of faith, the Church. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the life-shattering cases of sexual abuse of minors and vulnerable adults. Moreover, the Assembly has identified an even more insidious vulnerability within the Church's structures and ministry, which often enshrine and justify customs and practices that obfuscate or even contradict God's love and mercy for his creation and his people. Among these are the patterns of clericalism, ritualism, and the insistence on upholding traditions that are mere human customs endowed inappropriately with sacred status. This fragility undermines the efficacy of the biblical ministry and the effectiveness of Christian witnesses in general.
7. This honest acknowledgment of fragility and futility provided the backdrop for the Assembly on two essential levels. First, it highlighted the preciousness and value of life as a divine gift that must be cherished and safeguarded. Then, building on this foundation, the Word of God, which recognizes the frailty of life but, above all, proclaims the good news of hope rooted in God's love and grace, emerged as a truly valuable and life-giving gift for our fragile world.

III. Grace: God's Gifts for the Fragile World in and through the Word

8. At the heart of the Assembly's vision lies a perspective that centers on recognizing and acknowledging God's ceaseless grace, which created and sustains all life. This grace manifests itself in three concrete and tangible ways: through creation, sharing in the human condition, and the gift of God's revealed word.
9. The opening lines of the Gospel of John reveal that God and the Word, the "Logos," are one (cf. John 1:1). Through the divine Logos, who is God's own creative, life-giving, and life-sustaining presence, the entirety of creation was brought into existence (see John 1:3). Imbued with this life-giving presence, creation stands as the great divine self-gift. Having been brought into being by the divine Logos, creation manifests God's loving and intentional design, thus rendering the entirety of creation sacred as an expression of God's own nature.

10. While humankind is only a small part of creation, it holds a position of privilege as God has created people in his own image, entrusting them with the responsibility of safeguarding the fruitfulness and harmony of his design. As such, creation is not a gift bestowed upon humanity, but rather humanity is a gift bestowed upon creation. Humanity can engage in a meaningful relationship with the Creator through God's self-communication, revealed in Scripture. When one encounters God through his Word, a form of "divinization" occurs; human beings become "divine" in the sense that they are imbued with divine life, thereby transforming the ordinary into the sacred and the mortal into the eternal (cf. John 10:34-35).
11. God entered the world of humanity through the divine Logos, assuming human flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. By submitting himself to frailty and mortality, Jesus shared our human condition in every way (cf. John 1:14; Phil 2:7-8; Heb 2:14-18). Through the Holy Spirit, God continues to remain with humanity on its sojourn in a fragile world. The Holy Spirit shares the human condition, "groaning" with us in our weakness (cf. Rom 8:27). This implies that the Spirit participates in our suffering while guiding our prayers and animating our longings.
12. The revelation of God's Word in the Scripture is a gift of grace that might be broadly defined as "kerygma." In its strict sense, kerygma focuses on the Christ Event. However, when understood broadly as the proclamation of God's life-giving work, kerygma begins with creation and encompasses the entirety of God's creative work and salvific design.
13. The Bible, as kerygma, testifies to God's grace and has the potential to inspire a personal encounter with God and Christ. Consequently, the Bible is a conduit of life, connecting individuals to divine life. The Word of God is genuinely alive and active (cf. Heb 4:12-13), possessing the ability to convey and impart life. This giftedness of the Word expresses itself in three ways:
 - a) **The Gift of Meaning.** The Bible reveals the meaning of human existence by disclosing God's original intent and purpose in creating humanity. This revelation can help alleviate the trauma of meaninglessness that pervades so much of contemporary life.
 - b) **The Gift of Hope.** Meaning is contingent upon and grounded in hope. The Word of God offers humankind a grasp of its destiny, its *telos* which lies in the realm of hope. Moreover, the Scripture confirms this hope by bearing witness to the redemptive acts of God as witnessed and experienced by past generations.
 - c) **The Gift of Harmony.** The Word of God reveals the essential unity and inherent interconnectedness of all beings; we are all part of the same divinely shaped landscape that is also our home. The Scripture anchors us in this landscape and defines our place in it by conveying the profound message that we have a common origin in the initial "days" of creation, share the same home called planet Earth, and are destined for a common future in God's new creation.

IV. Mission: Proclaiming God's Word in the Fragile World

14. The primary mission of the Catholic Biblical Federation is to proclaim the Word of God to the fragile world and the Church, a mission that is rooted in and derived from Scripture. This mission aims to lead the faithful to a more profound personal experience of God's creative love, Christ's redemptive power, and the Holy Spirit's sustaining presence. The Assembly affirms that the CBF's guiding vision is to proclaim the good news of God's unfailing love, which will ultimately triumph over all forms of fragility and brokenness to restore God's creation to its rightful state (cf. Rom 8:21-27).

15. The pontificate and magisterium of Pope Francis have been a source of inspiration for the CBF's emphasis on evangelization. His teachings highlight the transformative nature of a personal encounter with divine love and power: a true Christian is someone transformed by the Christ Event. As such, the biblical ministry should prioritize leading individuals to this transformative encounter with God and Christ rather than expounding on dogmas or maintaining existing structures. Within this context, the proclamation of the Word of God, which facilitates and leads to these transformative encounters, lies at the very heart of the evangelization mission and project.
16. The Federation's tireless and decades-long efforts to bring Scripture to the center of the Church's life and ministry bore fruit in the pronouncement of Pope Benedict XVI, who, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, unequivocally declared with outstanding clarity and conviction that the Bible should inspire and animate all aspects and forms of the pastoral ministry of the Church (cf. *VD*, 73). Thus, faithful to its heritage and unique mission within the Catholic Church, the Federation must continue to serve as the backbone of biblical pastoral formation and strive to establish biblical pastoral ministry as the foundation of all ministries in the Church rather than just one among many. In line with this mission and in response to major concerns of the contemporary world and the Church discussed during the Assembly, the delegates have identified the following goals as the guiding principles for the Federation's activities in the coming years:
- a) to infuse the biblical perspective into all aspects and expressions of Church life: dioceses, parishes, educational institutions, various groups and movements in diverse settings,
 - b) to facilitate biblically-based faith formation for the faithful of all ages and states of life,
 - c) to pursue the broadest possible ecclesial collaboration for Bible-promoting initiatives, such as "Sunday of the Word of God" and others,
 - d) to utilize forms of communication that are relevant and comprehensible to people in any given context,
 - e) to employ means of communication that are accessible to the broadest possible audience, with an emphasis on digital and social media.
17. The Catholic Church is a community composed of believers from diverse walks and states of life who share equal dignity and co-responsibility for evangelization and other aspects of ecclesial life. In line with this principle, the involvement and empowerment of laypeople in biblical pastoral ministry is our time's critical need and concern. The inclusion and cooperation of laypeople are central to synodality. Therefore, providing biblical formation to the lay faithful is essential to equip them with the knowledge and skills required to become qualified teachers and proclaimers of the Word.
18. To be effective and transformative, evangelization must be both intercultural and contextual. Every local Church and community is rooted in its unique context and faces specific types and forms of fragility that must be considered when proclaiming and interpreting the Word. Proclaiming the Word in any "fragile context" demands not just an exegesis of the text but also an exegesis of reality and a dialogue between the text and the context. Consequently, Scripture must be read carefully considering the recipient culture and audience and with appropriate attention to the context. Only when such dialogue between the Word and the context is facilitated can the revealed message be proclaimed in a manner that is meaningful and relevant to the people, and the power of the Word can transform their lives.

V. Conclusion

19. The Assembly recognized and emphasized that the Catholic Biblical Federation's service to the human community and the Church must reflect a profound sense of co-responsibility rooted in Scripture. This co-responsibility reflects three essential characteristics of the Word of God that are particularly relevant to our fragile world today:
- a) **The Word is Life: Co-responsibility for Creation.** Given the perilous threat posed by the human way of life and the current societal and political structures, taking responsibility for creation is crucial for our survival. Biblical ministry must proclaim and demonstrate that this responsibility is rooted in God's Word and reflects God's will.
 - b) **The Word is Light: Co-responsibility for Humanity.** The human community is fragile and vulnerable on all levels and spheres: physical, spiritual, individual, communal, political, and environmental. The guidance provided by Scripture is essential to save humanity from its own destructive tendencies because the Word of God outlines a vision of a harmonious human community designed and desired by the Creator. Biblical ministry must share this vision with the fragile human community and be driven by a sense of responsibility to make it a reality. Reflecting God's concerns revealed in Scripture, this ministry must be especially mindful of the poor, the needy, the powerless, and the downtrodden; of the least, the last, and the lost.
 - c) **The Word is Communion: Co-responsibility for the Church.** The Scriptural vision of the Church articulated in both the Old and New Testaments presents it as a community of God's holy and priestly people (Exod 19:5-6) united in the common priesthood of all believers (cf. 1 Pet 2:5). According to this vision, all are accountable to God and one another while carrying out their unique priestly missions in various forms and modes. Within this framework, the biblical ministry and the Federation must strive to engage all believers in the quest of making God's Word accessible, known, and understood; to enable and empower every community and each of its members to become an active and integral part of the serving Church.
20. During their time together, the Assembly's delegates experienced a sense of hope and grace, even as they recognized the ever-present shadow of fragility, brokenness, and "groaning." This shadow was lifted by a profound sense of connection to a larger community of believers, the Church, enlivened by the gift of life that comes from God's Word. Although we share in the sufferings and existence in a fractured world, we are sustained by an unshakable and sure hope that is grounded in the experience of God's love (cf. Rom 5:5). In this fragile yet vibrant landscape of contemporary life, the Federation resolves to be God's instrument, working towards the recreation of the world in accordance with the divine plan as laid out in Scripture. Within this hopeful context, the "groaning" that arises from our fragility is transformed into a "sighing" of hope, a yearning for the dawn of God's new creation that we long for and towards which we strive.